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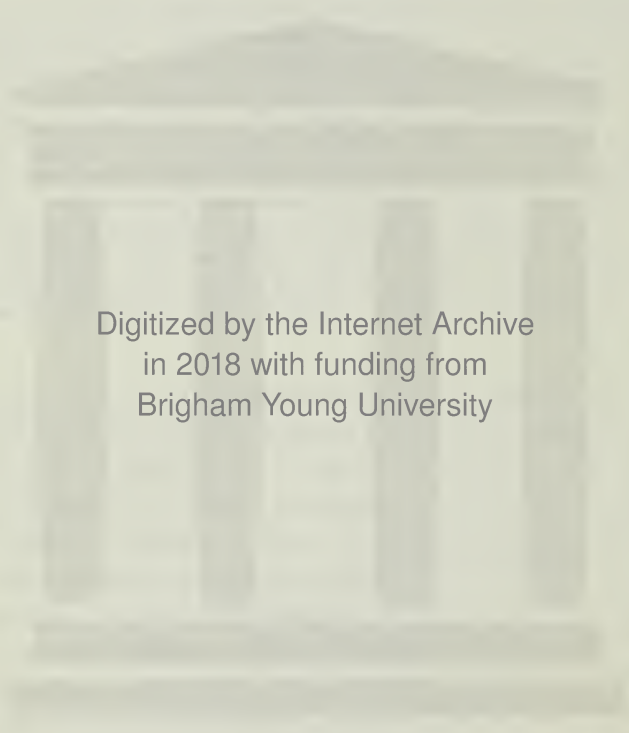


## COMMUNISM AMONG THE MORMONS

### SUMMARY

Introduction. Relative importance of communism in the economic life of the Mormons. I. Historical background, 135. — Physiographical conditions in Jackson County, Missouri, 137. — The Mormon social body, 137. — II. Joseph Smith's first outline of the United Order. Characteristics of his project, 139. — The first attempt at Independence, 146. — The Mormon "deeds," 147. — Reasons for first failure, 151. — Comparison of the order with contemporaneous communities, 152. — III. The order elsewhere in Missouri, Ohio, and Illinois, 155. — IV. The order in Utah, 156. — Influence of Brigham Young, 158. — His efforts to establish communism, 159. — Outstanding attributes, 162. — History of the Utah plan, 164. — Orderville, 165. — V. Conclusion. Causes of failure, 171. — Hope of future revival, 173.

IN the midst of the controversies that have raged more or less continuously around the Mormon church during the ninety-two years of its existence, many phases of its history, possessing little or no religious bearing, have been almost entirely overlooked. Particularly is this true with respect to the economic aspects of Mormonism. It would appear that the very intensity of the interest displayed in the peculiar Mormon doctrines, both by adherent and opponent, together with what has seemed to be an irresistible desire to give expression to the widely divergent views thereon, has proved a sufficient deterrent to prevent examination of things economic. Some such stumbling block has certainly operated to distract attention, because the economic field in relation to Mormon history, altho showing unique and unusual interest, stands today virtually unexplored by unbiased scholarly investigation. Hence



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it is not strange that so little is known of the Mormon attempt to establish a system of communism.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly this particular activity did not exert a strongly determinative influence in the larger courses of Mormon affairs, as did their utilization of irrigation and their institution of coöperative stores and industries. Yet it was of substantial importance and, especially as a comparative study with other existing communistic schemes, merits consideration.

To approach the problem intelligently requires that the underlying causes giving rise to Mormon communism first be outlined. This necessitates a portrayal of the historical background, a brief survey of the physiographical conditions of western Missouri — and later of Utah — and an estimate of the qualities of the Mormon social body, including its leadership. Thereafter the characteristics of the communistic attempts may be described; their salient features enumerated; their history reviewed; and the reasons for their eventual failure ascertained.

It ought to be hardly necessary to suggest that an exposition within these limits has no concern with the Mormon religion as such. Only when religious belief, as a moving cause, is transmuted into economic fact, as a proximate result, does it enter into the scope of this article.

## I

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized at Fayette, Seneca County, New York, on

1. This term is used here in the same sense in which it has universally been applied in America to the communistic systems of the Shakers, Harmonists, Zoarists, Perfectionists and others. It does not include the connotation attached to the International Communists in general and at present to the Russian Communists in particular. What Hinds says in his first edition of *American Communities* about American communes is applicable here. William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities*, 1st ed., Oneida, N. Y., 1878, pp. 159, 160.





April 6, 1830.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter its founder, Joseph Smith, dispatched a number of missionaries into Ohio and the West, who, in the course of their journey, came in contact with a small group of "Disciples," or "Campbellites," living at Kirtland, Geauga County, Ohio. So much success was experienced in converting these people and their co-religionists to Mormonism that Smith decided to move his headquarters to Kirtland. Accordingly, in early February, 1831, he reached that place and issued instructions to his followers to assemble there. By the latter part of 1831 this "gathering" had been fairly well accomplished, so much so that most of the members of the new cult had left their previous residences in New York, Pennsylvania, and New England and were living in or near Kirtland.

But the assembly in northern Ohio must be regarded as in fact only a preliminary step to a more ambitious plan which Joseph Smith had in mind. He purported to have received revelations from God designating Jackson County, Missouri, as the modern "Zion" and the "gathering place of the Saints." Independence was to be the headquarters of the church, the scene of its principal activities, and the center of a comprehensive system of proselytizing to be launched in the United States and Canada.<sup>3</sup> In furtherance of this scheme, the missionaries who first reached Kirtland had gone on to Missouri and made a cursory inspection of the country surrounding Independence, reporting later to their leader. Smith himself visited what he was pleased to call the "land of Zion" in July, 1831.<sup>4</sup>

2. History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, published by the church, Salt Lake City, 1902, vol. i, pp. 75-78. The early volumes are built around the journals of Joseph Smith; the notes are by B. H. Roberts. The six volumes thus far issued bring the history up to 1846, when the Mormons were expelled from Nauvoo, Illinois.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 163, 189, 190, 192, 194, 200, 206 et seq.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 188.



Western Missouri at this time had been but sparsely settled. Seven years had yet to elapse before Kansas City was even laid out as a municipality; and Independence, altho the principal town, was little more than a straggling village. The population of Jackson County was made up of frontiersmen — quasi-nomadic farmers, hunters, and trappers, men accustomed to living on the fringes of civilization. Ways of communication and the other conveniences of a more settled country were of necessity the most primitive. But the rolling prairies, with their luxuriant growth of vegetation, rich soil, and plenitude of wild game, had a most pleasing appearance to the youthful Mormon prophet and his followers; no doubts beset their minds as to the desirable qualities of the divinely appointed "New Jerusalem."<sup>5</sup>

These Mormon people who had come together at Kirtland and who now hoped to "go down into Zion" formed an unusual social body. For the most part they had lived previously in the rural districts of Ohio, New England and the Northern Atlantic States. Typical of country Americans of that period, their antecedents, their traditions, and their environment showed them to be of untainted native stock. Some of them, by previous association with other sects, had experienced various phases of the intense emotionalism so typical of the religious life of the time; but their new cult uprooted them from their surroundings and threw them together under conditions altogether unique. These factors, together with the persecution and ridicule to which they were subjected, brought about naturally the result that their religious unity was unusually strengthened and their wealth was generally limited as to quantity and substantially equal as to distribution. In addition, their peculiar religious organization aided in

5. History of the Church, vol i, pp. 197, 198



cementing their social cohesion and made them more susceptible of ecclesiastical control.

At the time under consideration this control was concentrated entirely in the hands of Joseph Smith. Believing that his teachings and instructions were based upon divine revelation, the Mormons followed him implicitly. Whatever else others may think of this young man — he was then twenty-six — there can be no doubt that those who accepted his doctrines looked upon him with a reverence almost akin to worship. His word exacted complete obedience and his authority remained unquestioned. As yet the organization of the church had not been worked out in detail, so no precedents could be invoked or followed. Accordingly, whenever an important question of church policy or discipline arose — and often as to less important matters — Smith announced the solution in a new revelation. As he often expressed it: "I inquired of the Lord and received the following."<sup>6</sup> The source of his power, then, lay in the fact that his followers regarded him as the medium through which a benevolently interested Deity exercised control over their destiny. Yet tho he may best be characterized as essentially a visionary and doctrinaire, rather than a master of practical affairs, his personality so thoroly dominated his associates as to constitute his leadership a most important factor in their common action.

## II

Just as the communistic system of the Shakers grew out of the revelations of Ann Lee,<sup>7</sup> that of the Har-

6. History of the Church, vol. i, pp. 22, 23, 28, 33, 45, 48, 49, 53, 80, 101, etc.

7. William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities and Cooperative Colonies*, second revision, Chicago, 1908, pp. 34, 38. Hereafter only the second revised edition is referred to and it will be cited, as will Nordhoff's volume, only by the author's name. (Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, New York 1875, pp. 119, 125-127.)



ments from the humanely despotic *Lebensreform* of George Rapp,<sup>8</sup> the Zoar Community of Separatists from Joseph Bäumeler's "personal commandments with the Holy Spirit,"<sup>9</sup> and the group of American Inspirationists from the divine inspiration of Christ Metz,<sup>1</sup> so the communism of the Mormons had its reception in the revelations of Joseph Smith. Early in 1830 he announced the ground work of a system of property holding for the faithful in his church which later formed the basis of their community enterprise. Smith advanced no claims of personal authorship of the plan, but claimed divine origin for it; and as such it was accepted by his followers. In view of the fact, as will later develop, that so little data is available as to its actual practice, especially in Missouri, the outline laid down by the Mormon prophet must be given more than ordinary consideration.

Curiously enough his pronouncements did not set out the plan in its entirety, as a well developed whole. Instead, it was promulgated piecemeal, at various times, in several visions, and merely as incidental to other matters. Taking from his revelations those isolated portions applicable to the subject and placing them in the chronological order of their publication, the plan discloses itself as follows:

30. And behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast received unto them with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken.

31. . . . they shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors. . . .

32. And it shall come to pass, that after they are laid before the bishop of my church, and after that he has received these testimonies concerning the consecration of the properties of my church, that they cannot be taken from the church agreeable to my com-

8. Hinds, p. 96.

9. Ibid., p. 129; Nordhoff, pp. 100, 101.

1. Hinds, pp. 304-306; Nordhoff, pp. 26, 27.





mandments; every man shall be made accountable unto me, a steward over his own property, or that which he has received by consecration, inasmuch as is sufficient for himself and family.

33. And again, if there shall be properties in the hands of the church, or any individuals of it, more than is necessary for their support, after this first consecration, which is a residue to be consecrated unto the bishop, it shall be kept to administer to those who have not, from time to time, that every man who has need may be amply supplied, and receive according to his wants.

34. Therefore, the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy, as shall be appointed by the High Council of the church, and the bishop and his council.

35. And for the purpose of purchasing lands for the public benefit of the church, and building houses of worship, and building up of the New Jerusalem which is to be hereinafter revealed, . . .

42. Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.<sup>2</sup>

3. Wherefore let my servant Edward Partridge, . . . appoint unto this people their portion, every man equal according to their families, according to their circumstances, and their wants and needs.

4. And let my servant Edward Partridge, when he shall appoint a man his portion, give unto him a writing that shall secure unto him his portion, that he shall hold it, even this right and this inheritance in the church, until he transgresses and is not accounted worthy by the voice of the church, according to the laws and covenants of the church, to belong to the church;

5. And if he shall transgress and is not accounted worthy to belong to the church, he shall not have power to claim that portion which he has consecrated unto the bishop for the poor and needy of my church; therefore, he shall not retain the gift, but shall only have claim on that portion that is deeded unto him. . . .

9. And let every man deal honestly, and be alike among this people, and receive alike, that ye may be one. . . .

13. And again, let the bishop appoint a storehouse unto this church, and let all things both in money and in meat, which is more than is needful for the want of this people, be kept in the hands of the bishop.<sup>3</sup>

2. February 9, 1831. *History of the Church*, vol. i, pp. 150, 151; *Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 42: 30-35, 42. The last-mentioned volume is the compilation of the revelations of Joseph Smith. Like the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Pearl of Great Price, it constitutes one of the standard and authoritative works of the church and by the Mormons is held in the greatest reverence.

3. May, 1831. *History of the Church*, vol. i, pp. 173, 174; *Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 51: 3-5, 9, 13.



5. That you may be equal in the hands of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things;

6. For if ye are not equal in earthly things, ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things;<sup>4</sup>

17. And you are to be equal, or in other words, you are to have equal claims on the properties, for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardships, every man according to his wants and needs, inasmuch as his wants are just;

18. And all this for the benefit of the church of the living God, that every man may improve upon his talent . . . to be cast into the Lord's storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church.<sup>5</sup>

4. All children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age.

5. And after that they have claim upon the church, or in other words upon the Lord's storehouse if their parents have not wherewith to give them inheritances.

6. And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church, and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor.<sup>6</sup>

68. And all moneys that you receive in your stewardships, by improving upon the properties which I have appointed unto you in houses, or in lands, or in cattle, or in all things save it be the holy and sacred writings, which I have reserved unto myself for holy and sacred purposes, shall be cast into the treasury as fast as you receive moneys. . . .

70. And let not any man among you say that it is his own, for it shall not be called his, nor any part of it;

71. And there shall not any part of it be used, or taken out of the treasury, only by the voice and common consent of the order.

72. And this shall be the voice and common consent of the order, that any man among you say unto the treasurer, I have need of this help to me in my stewardship;

73. . . . the treasurer shall give unto him the sum which he requires, to help him in his stewardship.

74. Until he be found a transgressor, and it is manifest before the council of the order plainly, that he is an unwise and an unfaithful steward;

4. March, 1832. History of the Church, vol. i, p. 256; Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 78: 5-6.

5. April 26, 1832. History of the Church, vol. i, p. 268. Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 82: 17, 18.

6. April 30, 1832. History of the Church, vol. i, p. 270. Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 4-6.



the same shall be in full fellowship with the Church, and you shall be sworn that this shall be first taken down to the treasury, and the treasurer shall not withhold it . . . .

And any one the treasurer is found an unfaithful, and an unrighteous man, shall be subject to the censure and voice of the order, and shall be cast out of his place, and another shall be appointed in his stead.

These replies, constituting the foregoing meagre outline, cover all that was recorded by Joseph Smith in explanation of his purported divine system of community property holding. In the actual instillation of the project it is possible that he added materially to his initial statements, but if so, such matters are not of record. Consequently it has remained for other and later Mormon writers to add the superstructure upon the foundation which he laid. Reference must be made, therefore, to these additional sources to facilitate an understanding of the plan, including its peculiar nomenclature.

The system was officially designated the United Order, but occasionally it is referred to in Mormon circles as the "Order of Enoch." The transfer of property to the church in the order was called "consecration," while the status under which members held it was known as "stewardship."

The scheme originally contemplated that each member, upon joining the church, should enter the order. The first step came about in the transfer of all the property of the initiate to a local church officer. This

7. April 23, 1834. History of the Church, vol. II, pp. 55, 60; Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 104: 68-75, 77.

In addition to these instructions for the United Order, the youthful prophet evolved a detailed plan for buying out the City of Zions, 1,200 blocks, with lots of prescribed sizes and locations. Provision was made for the schools, farms, and religious buildings. See History of the Church, vol. II, pp. 62, 65.

8. This appellation comes from Enoch, the seventh patriarch, of descent from Adam, who, according to Mormon theology, practiced the "United Order" successfully in ancient times. See James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith, written by appointment and authorized by the church, Salt Lake City, 1901, pp. 358, 362, 450. The author is now an apostle in the church.





cluded a complete "consecration" of such possessions to the bishop, who thereafter held title to them for and on behalf of the order as "common property of the church."<sup>9</sup> The utilization and administration of the property was then effected by a second transfer from the bishop to the member of such parts of the materials previously "consecrated" as were "according to his wants and needs, inasmuch as his wants are just." It might be "the same farm or workshop that the individual had previously consecrated."<sup>1</sup> The transferee then became a "steward" over the property held, a position somewhat analogous to that of a trustee at law.<sup>2</sup> Apparently the bishop was to be the judge of the "wants and needs" of the "steward," but the kind and amount of things to be turned over might be determined by the latter's "individual tastes, abilities or capacities."<sup>3</sup> For "the varying grades of occupation will still exist; there will be laborers, whose qualifications fit them best for common toil, and managers who have proved their ability to lead and direct; some who can serve the cause of God best with the pen, others with the plow; there will be engineers

"The Lord ordained that every man . . . should consecrate all of his property . . . How consecrate it? . . . The law was consecrate all of your properties, whether it be gold or silver, or mules, or wagons, or carriages, or store goods, or anything with wealth in it — all was to be consecrated, to come to the Lord's storehouse. Agents were appointed to receive these consecrations. Not consecrate to any man, or these agents, but consecrate to the Lord. . . ." Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses* (a compilation of the sermons of Mormon leaders), vol. xvi, p. 153, August 16, 1873. Orson Pratt was an apostle under both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and was regarded as the most learned man among the Mormons of his time.

Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, Salt Lake City, 1892, vol. i, p. 84. This writer's views may be accepted as authoritative with respect to their orthodoxy, because at the time of the publication of his history he was a Mormon bishop and at present an apostle.

"What is a steward? Is he a bona fide holder of property? No. If I were called on to be a steward over a certain farm or factory, the business is not my own. I am only as an agent or steward to take charge of the concern and act upon it, as a wise steward, and to render up my account to somebody. . . ." Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvi, p. 154, August 16, 1873.

B. H. Roberts, *New Witness for God*, Salt Lake City, 1911, vol. i, p. 399. Mr. Roberts is a high official in the Mormon church and probably its leading publicist.



and mechanics, artisans and artists, farmers and scholars, teachers, professors, and authors; -- every-one laboring as far as practicable in the sphere of his choice, but each required to work, and to work where and how he can be of the greatest service." <sup>4</sup>

Having once obtained the property constituting his "stewardship," the individual was required to manage it in such a way as to effect the most good for and the greatest profit to the order. Each year he was supposed to render an account of his holdings.<sup>5</sup> Any residue over and above the amount required for the support of himself and his immediate dependents must be returned to the bishop as a surplus. This surplus was to be used "first, in supplying the deficiency where stewardships fail to yield sufficient income for the necessities of those who possess them; second, to form or purchase new stewardships for such as have not received any; third, to supply those with means who may need it for the improvement or enlargement of their respective stewardships; fourth, the purchase of lands for the public benefit, to establish new enterprises, develop resources, build houses of worship, temples, send abroad the Gospel, or for anything else that looks to the general welfare and the founding of the Kingdom of God on earth." <sup>6</sup> To these purposes should be added the support of the poor, the aged, and other groups, who, by reason of physical, mental or other incapacity, are non-productive.

4. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, p. 452.

5. "To whom does he render this report or account? To the Lord's bishop . . . ; he reports what he has done with the means entrusted to his care. If a man has been entrusted with fifty or a thousand or with a million, to carry on some branch of business, he must, at the end of the year, render an account of that stewardship. If a man is only entrusted with a small farm, he renders an account of his stewardship at the end of the year . . . consecrating, at the end of the year, all that they have gained, excepting what it has cost to feed and clothe them." Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvi, pp. 4, 5, April 7, 1873.

6. B. H. Roberts, *New Witness for God*, vol. i, p. 399.



It would seem that the length of tenure of a "stewardship" was unlimited. Apparently as long as the member showed managerial capacity as to his holdings and complied with church regulations, he might retain his position; but /apostacy or unfaithfulness would cause his prompt ejection. In such case he could assert no claim to the goods he originally "dedicated" to the order, but only to that held at the time in "stewardship," which might be more or less than the amount initially brought in.

Little is said in Joseph Smith's exposition as to the practical management of his system, but presumably it was intended that the detailed church organization should perform that function. Within the plan itself the only provision as to duties of officers relates to the bishop, who is the recipient of all "dedicated" property, the apportioner of "stewardships,"<sup>7</sup> and the custodian of all surplus earnings of "stewardships." He might be replaced for being an unwise and unfaithful "steward."

Such were the salient features of the plan as sponsored

7. The following excerpts from a letter written by Joseph Smith to Bishop Edward Partridge some time in 1833 throw some light on this point.

"Brother Edward Partridge:

Sir: — I proceed to answer your questions, concerning the consecration of property: — First, it is not right to condescend to very great particulars in taking inventories. The fact is this, a man is bound by the law of the Church, to consecrate to the Bishop, before he can be considered a legal heir to the kingdom of Zion; and this, too, without constraint; and unless he does this, he cannot be acknowledged before the Lord on the Church Book: therefore, to condescend to particulars, I will tell you that every man must be his own judge how much he should receive, and how much he should suffer to remain in the hands of the Bishop. I speak of those who consecrate more than they need for the support of themselves and their families.

The matter of consecration must be done by the mutual consent of both parties; for to give the Bishop power to say how much every man shall have, and he be obliged to comply with the Bishop's judgment, is giving to the Bishop more power than a king has; and, upon the other hand, to let every man say how much he needs, and the Bishop be obliged to comply with his judgment, is to throw Zion into confusion, and make a slave of the Bishop. The fact is, there must be a balance or equilibrium of power between the Bishop and the people; and thus harmony and good-will may be preserved among you.

Therefore, those persons consecrating property to the Bishop in Zion, and then receiving an inheritance back, must reasonably show to the Bishop that they need as much as they claim. . . ." History of the Church, vol. i, pp. 364, 365.





by Joseph Smith and elaborated by his successors.<sup>8</sup> The question next arises as to how it worked out in actual practice. As previously pointed out, the first attempt was made in Independence, Missouri, but unfortunately it proved to be an abortive one. The cause lay not in the system itself, but arose from the fact that before the order was fairly under way the entire Mormon body was expelled by its neighbors from Jackson County and later from Missouri entirely. But the installation of the plan had progressed far enough that some of its principal objects were well along the road of realization and many of its chief characteristics were brought to light.

The Mormons whom Joseph Smith first sent to Independence in 1831 were, generally speaking, a selected lot. His first object being to start the nucleus of a colony there, he designated the leaders from among his most trusted lieutenants and sent as their colleagues only those in whom he had confidence. The initial group carried out the process of selection still further by insisting shortly after their arrival that their co-religionists who contemplated joining them should come only when equipped in some measure at least to contribute to the earning power of the body.<sup>9</sup> Thus, so far as the personnel was concerned, the practice of the order started under as favorable auspices as could be brought about by the Mormons.

Some of these people possessed a small measure of financial independence upon their arrival, but it is doubtful that many could boast of more than the ordinary necessities. The majority had been drawn

8. It is only fair to state at this point that modern Mormon writers not only deny that the "United Order" may be classed as communism, but go farther and insist that communistic schemes thus far devised compare most unfavorably with it. See Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, vol. i, pp. 82, 83; James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, p. 452; B. H. Roberts, *New Witness for God*, vol. i, pp. 395, 403.

9. *History of the Church*, vol. i, p. 279, 384, 385.





from the farmer class and agriculture was intended, of course, to be the basis of their activity. Hence little groups settled not only in Independence, but elsewhere nearby in Jackson County. All, however, came under the jurisdiction of Bishop Partridge, whose headquarters remained at that place. Eventually probably 200 Mormons<sup>1</sup> had migrated to this part of Missouri.

But tilling the soil did not make up entirely the economic pursuits practiced by the order. Coincident with the founding of "Zion," Joseph Smith contemplated the establishment of a periodical called the *Evening and Morning Star* for use in furthering Mormon propaganda. To this end he had collected sufficient money in Kirtland to purchase a printing press. This he sent to Independence under the direct charge of a man whom he designated as editor and manager. It was shortly placed in operation and several issues of the *Star* put out. Moreover, a store was started to serve the needs of the order. Two of the earliest converts in Kirtland, Newell K. Whitney and A. S. Gilbert, owned a general mercantile business and Smith directed them to send part of their stock to Zion.<sup>2</sup> This was done and the store commenced to function shortly thereafter.

Just what proportion of the Mormons in Jackson County turned in their property to the United Order is difficult to determine. The church records are regrettably vague on this point, but the available evidence indicates that the great majority did so. Definite it is that both the printing press and the store were "consecrated," altho the proceeds from the former, as set out in the prophet's revelations heretofore quoted, were to be used for a special purpose. Furthermore, it seems

1. *History of the Church*, vol. i, p. 438, footnote.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 270.



to have been the practice for the bishop to turn back to the donor, as his "stewardship," the identical property he had "dedicated." Some of the "consecrated" property was utilized to purchase land in Jackson County, such land being in turn leased out in "stewardship."<sup>3</sup>

In accordance with the plan, both of these transfers were evidenced by documents. The authorship of these "deeds which cannot be broken" is entirely uncertain. In form the instrument of "consecration" was as set out below:

BE IT KNOWN, THAT I, Titus Billings of Jackson county, and the state of Missouri, having become a member of the Church of Christ, organized according to law, and established by the revelations of the Lord, on the 6th day of April, 1830, do, of my own free will and accord, having first paid my just debts, grant and hereby give unto Edward Partridge of Jackson county and state of Missouri, Bishop of said Church, the following described property, viz:—  
—Sundry articles of furniture valued fifty-two dollars twenty-seven cents; also two beds, bedding and extra clothing valued seventy-three dollars twenty-five cents; also farming utensils valued forty-one dollars; also one horse, two wagons, two cows and two calves, valued one hundred forty-seven dollars.

For the purpose of purchasing lands in Jackson county, Mo., and building up the New Jerusalem, even Zion, and for relieving the wants of the poor and needy. For which I, the said Titus Billings, do covenant and bind myself and my heirs forever, to release all my right and interest to the above described property, unto him, the said Edward Partridge, Bishop of said Church.

And I, the said Edward Partridge, Bishop of said Church, having received the above described property, of the said Titus Billings, do bind myself, that I will cause the same to be expended for the above-mentioned purposes of the said Titus Billings to the satisfaction of said Church; and in case I should be removed from the office of Bishop of said Church, by death or otherwise, I hereby bind myself and my heirs forever, to make over to my successor in

3. See Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xviii, p. 103, June 14, 1874. "I understand that \$48,000 in money was paid by the Saints to the United States for lands in the state of Missouri." George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvii, p. 60, May 7, 1874. This sum included the purchase price of lands in Caldwell and elsewhere and is not limited to Jackson County.



office, for the benefit of said Church, all the above described property, which may then be in my possession.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and seals this . . . day of . . . , in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and thirty. . . .

In presence of { . . . . .

Signed { TITUS BILLINGS  
EDWARD PARTRIDGE <sup>4</sup>

The stewardship deed reads as follows:

BE IT KNOWN, THAT I, Edward Partridge, of Jackson county, state of Missouri, Bishop of the Church of Christ, organized according to law, and established by the revelations of the Lord, on the 6th day of April, 1830, have leased, and by these presents do lease unto Titus Billings, of Jackson county, and state of Missouri, a member of said Church, the following described piece or parcel of land, being a part of section No. three, township No. forty-nine, range No. thirty-two, situated in Jackson county, and state of Missouri, and is bounded as follows, viz.:—Beginning eighty rods E. from the S. W. corner of said section; thence N. one hundred and sixty rods; thence E. twenty-seven rods twenty-five links; thence S. one hundred and sixty rods; thence W. twenty-seven rods twenty-five links, to the place of beginning, containing twenty-seven and one-half acres, be the same more or less, subject to roads and highways. And also have loaned the following described property, viz.:—Sundry articles of furniture, valued fifty-five dollars twenty-five cents; also two beds, bedding and clothing, valued seventy-three dollars twenty-seven cents; also sundry farming utensils, valued forty-one dollars; also one horse, two cows, two calves, and two wagons, valued one hundred forty-seven dollars, to have and to hold the above described property, by him, the said Titus Billings, to be used and occupied as to him shall seem meet and proper.

And as a consideration for the use of the above described property, I, the said Titus Billings, do bind myself to pay the taxes, and also to pay yearly unto the said Edward Partridge, Bishop of said Church, or his successor in office, for the benefit of said Church, all that I shall make or accumulate more than is needful for the support and comfort of myself and family. And it is agreed by the parties, that this lease and loan shall be binding during the life of the said Titus Billings unless he transgresses, and is not deemed worthy by the authority of the Church, according to its laws, to

4. History of the Church, vol. i, pp. 365, 366.





belong to the Church. And in that case I, the said Titus Billings, do acknowledge that I forfeit all claim to the above described leased and loaned property, and hereby bind myself to give back the lease, and also pay an equivalent for the loaned articles, for the benefit of said Church, unto the said Edward Partridge, Bishop of said Church, or his successor in office. And further, in case of said Titus Billings' or family's inability in consequence of infirmity or old age, to provide for themselves while members of this Church, I, the said Edward Partridge, Bishop of said Church, do bind myself to administer to their necessities out of any fund in my hands appropriated for that purpose, not otherwise disposed of, to the satisfaction of the Church. And further, in case of the death of the said Titus Billings, his wife or widow, being at the time a member of said Church, has claim upon the above described leased and loaned property, upon precisely the same conditions that her said husband had them, as above described; and the children of the said Titus Billings, in case of the death of both their parents, also have claim upon the above described property, for their support, until they shall become of age, and no longer; subject to the same conditions yearly that their parents were; provided, however, should the parents not be members of said Church and in possession of the above described property at the time of their deaths, the claim of the children as above described, is null and void.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and seals this . . . day of . . . , in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and thirty. . . .

In presence of { .....

Signed { EDWARD PARTRIDGE  
TITUS BILLINGS \*

It is extremely doubtful that the order reached the stage where a surplus was obtained by any member from his "stewardship."<sup>6</sup> Nothing definite can be stated, therefore, as a result of the first attempt, on the practicability of the plan to utilize the surplus as contemplated. Nor did experience with it go so far in

5. History of the Church, vol. i, pp. 366, 367.

6. "I was present at the time the revelation came for the brethern to give their surplus property into the hands of the Bishops for the building up of Zion, but I never knew a man yet who had a dollar of surplus property. No matter how much one might have, he wanted all he had for himself, for his children, his grandchildren and so forth." Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, vol. xvi, p. 11, April 17, 1873.



ther respects as to make it a fair criterion by which the system might be judged. For it was hardly well under way before the people of Jackson County and the surrounding territory drove the Mormons bodily out of the county, necessitating the abandonment of their property and the discontinuance of the practice of the order. A detailed study of the plan, as disclosed by the first attempt at its practice is, therefore, impossible. Certain definite conclusions may be drawn, however, as to the relation of this attempt with the conditions surrounding it.

In the first place, it must be laid down as indisputable that the Mormon enterprise of communism stood in no relation of effect and cause with the physical conditions obtaining where its practice was essayed. Nothing can be pointed to in connection with the soil, climate, or physiographical characteristics of western Missouri which tended to produce communism rather than some other form of economic life. Nor is the fact that agriculture formed the basis of the system of controlling weight, for such would have been the case elsewhere. Again, it is apparent that the order was not evolved from any unique qualities of the Mormon people. Their records disclose no intimation that any impulse had existed theretofore on their part toward communistic endeavor, or any effort been made to try it. Of course, the close cohesion of the Mormons, arising from their religious system, together with their amenability to church discipline, formed most favorable factors towards the unity and centralized control so necessary to communistic success; but these circumstances alone, without extraneous action upon them, could have produced no results whatever in this connection. The conclusion is inevitable that the genesis of the **United Order** must be accounted for on grounds



separate from the physical conditions of western Missouri and the social nature of the Mormons. The fact is that it was a scheme superimposed upon these factors by the fiat of Joseph Smith, possibly because of their adaptability to what he intended, but in its origin entirely foreign to both of them.

It is worth while, however, to ascertain the extent to which the order may be traced to the various communistic enterprises which existed in the United States at the time of its establishment.

The first case of communism encountered by the Mormons was in Kirtland itself. The Campbellites, who accepted Mormonism here in the beginning, had previously lived in some form of community property holding,<sup>7</sup> for they referred to themselves as the "family" and their association as "common stock." Nothing can be determined as to the characteristics of this concern except that it was an avowed effort to imitate the apostolic Christians. But it met with the disapproval of the prophet, who states that it "was readily abandoned for the more perfect law of the Lord and the false spirits were easily discerned and rejected by the light of revelation."<sup>8</sup>

The next contact between Mormonism and communism came with the Shakers. Sometime in March, 1831, "Leman Copley, one of the sect called Shaking Quakers, embraced the fullness of the everlasting Gospel, apparently honest-hearted, but still retaining the idea that the Shakers were right in some particular of their faith."<sup>9</sup> Smith thereupon announced a revelation directed particularly to Copley and two others which the latter were commanded to return to the n

7. *History of the Church*, vol. i, p. 124.

8. *Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 146, 147.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 167.





convert's erstwhile co-religionists and preach his newly found creed. In the revelation the celibacy of the Shakers was condemned and, referring no doubt to Ann Lee's pretensions as to the reincarnation of Christ,<sup>1</sup> it was stated that "the Son of Man cometh not in the form of a woman."<sup>2</sup> But the success of the mission to these people thus ordered was only what might have been expected in the light of their steadfastness and fervor — not a single Shaker was converted.<sup>3</sup>

At this time four Shaker colonies flourished in Ohio.<sup>4</sup> That at North Union, in the vicinity of Cleveland, was the nearest to Kirtland, while the Watervliet, White Water, and Union Village groups, in the southern part of the state, were not inaccessible from that place. Thus, aside from the information obtainable from Leman Copley, the Mormon representatives in Ohio, as well as in New York, had ample opportunity to observe the Shaker practices. But it is evident that the United Order of the Latter-day Saints did not originate with the Shakers — the only common thing between the two was that both came within the category of communism. The strict separation of the sexes enjoined by the Shakers certainly was never adopted by the Mormons. And where communism was a fundamental of the Shaker cult, it has already been made

1 Nordhoff, pp. 132, 133.

2 History of the Church vol. i, p. 169.

3 "Elders Rigdon and Pratt fulfilled the mission appointed to them by this revelation. In company with Leman Copley, who at his own earnest request had been ordained to the priesthood (John Whitmer's History of the Church, p. 20), they visited the settlement of the Shakers, near Cleveland, Ohio, and preached the Gospel to them; but," writes Elder Pratt, "they utterly refused to hear or obey the Gospel." — Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, p. 65 (first ed.). John Whitmer also remarks upon this incident: "The above-named brethern went and proclaimed [the Gospel] according to the revelation given them, but the Shakers hearkened not to their words and received not the Gospel at that time; for they are bound in tradition and priestcraft; and thus they are led away with vain and foolish imaginations." — John Whitmer's History of the Church, MS., p. 20." History of the Church, vol. i, p. 169, footnote.

4. See the map in Nordhoff, p. 23.





clear that the order, at least as it actually worked out formed a mere adjunct to the Mormon creed. Nor does a study of the Shaker system reveal anything similar to the "consecration" and "stewardship" of the United Order.<sup>5</sup>

Another communistic society which might have come within the observation of the Mormons in the early thirties was the Separatists of Zoar, Tuscarawas County, Ohio. Mormon histories make no mention of this group, altho it seems possible some of their missionaries might have encountered them. But nothing like the two Zoar classes of probationary and full membership ever appeared in the Mormon order, nor is the Zoar covenant more than superficially similar to the Mormon "deeds." Moreover, the forms of government were admittedly entirely different.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Mormon itinerant preachers might have reached the Rappists, or Harmony Society, before 1831 in their third and final home at Economy, near Pittsburgh; but no record is to be found to that effect. Here again the dissimilarity between the partial celibacy of the Harmonists and the Mormon views on marriage precludes any idea of copying by the latter. But some resemblance does show between the Articles of Association of the Rappists and the Mormon "deeds."<sup>7</sup>

This brief survey of possible connections between the Mormons and existing communes suffices to show that from the available evidence the United Order was not derived primarily from sources outside the Mormon creed. The general idea of communism might very well have been taken from the Shakers and with less likelihood from the Zoar Separatists or Harmonists — altho with respect to the last two such a derivation

5. Nordhoff, pp. 117-232; Hinds, pp. 32-68.

6. Nordhoff, pp. 105-107; Hinds, pp. 113-119.

7. Nordhoff, p. 81; Hinds, pp. 89-98.



is purely conjectural. But it is clear that the peculiar characteristics of the Mormon order were original — their “consecration,” their “stewardship,” their unique disposition of surplus, their system of government.

### III

Altho, after leaving Jackson County, some of the Mormons settled in Caldwell County and other parts of Missouri, their sojourn proved to be only temporary; and it is extremely doubtful that any other attempt was made in that state to practice the United Order.<sup>8</sup> After their exodus from Missouri the main body of the church returned to Ohio. Under Joseph Smith's directions there had apparently been some steps taken to institute the order in Kirtland almost simultaneously with its inception in Independence. In any event, on December 4, 1831, Smith ordered that the Kirtland order should be distinct and separate from that in Missouri.<sup>9</sup> Even so, as judged from the available evidence, practically nothing was accomplished towards its consummation. Other matters of more immediate and pressing importance seem to have engrossed the attention of the young leader to the neglect of his communistic aims. The Mormon records of the time show a marked paucity of mention of the order during the second sojourn of the church in Ohio. Nor did it again assume a place of importance in Mormon affairs when the entire body was moved to Illinois and the city of

8. The only available record of a revival of the order in Missouri is found in the statement made by George A. Smith, one of President Young's counselors, May 7, 1874:

“In 1838, an attempt was made in Caldwell County, Missouri, the Latter-day Saints owning all the lands in the County, or all that were considered of any value. They organized Big Field United Firms, by which they intended to consolidate their property and to regard it as the property of the Lord, and themselves only as stewards; but they had not advanced so far in this matter as to perfect their system before they were broken up and driven from the State.” *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvii, p. 60.

9. Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, vol. i, p. 92.



Nauvoo was founded. Indeed, Joseph Smith, who when announcing the plan emphasized it as of the most vital moment for the temporal and spiritual salvation of his people, neglected it, curiously enough, during the rest of his life after the first failure in Missouri. The value placed on it by the Mormons themselves may be gathered from the fact that altho they lived in Nauvoo almost seven years, altho they were practically unmolested during the greater part of this period, altho the city attained a population of 20,000,<sup>1</sup> and altho other church activities were developed to the fullest extent, nothing whatever was done to revive the United Order. Indeed, the only communistic enterprise launched in Nauvoo was by the Icarians, founded by Etienne Cabet, and this did not eventuate until May, 1850.<sup>2</sup> But by that date Joseph Smith had been killed by an Illinois mob, the church had been expelled from Nauvoo, and Brigham Young, the murdered founder's successor, had led the Mormons across the plains to the Rocky Mountains and established there the beginnings of the state of Utah.

#### IV

How the Mormons, upon their arrival in Utah in 1847, found their new dwelling place to be but a forbidding desert; how, in the realization that they must either be self-supporting or succumb to starvation, they set about to establish themselves upon the soil; how the surrounding conditions and the nature of their social fabric led to a practice of irrigation based on coöperative principles; how, after tremendous difficulties and hardships, they eventually prospered; how they later instituted a system of coöperative stores and

1. History of Utah, vol 1 p 276.

2. Hinds, p. 369; Nordhoff, p 334.



industries; how finally they spread into most of the neighboring states in the Great Basin — these matters, tho possessing their own interest, must be passed over here entirely, except by way of furnishing continuity to the theme under consideration.<sup>3</sup> What should be noted, however, is that the economic life of the Mormons in this period took its direction and form from the conditions under which they lived. No better example of the response of economic activity to environmental influence is found anywhere. Whatever other minor elements are discovered to be involved, a study of the situation leads inevitably to the conclusion that two factors were chiefly effective, namely, the physiographical conditions of the Great Basin and the Mormon social make-up.

Nothing is more remarkable than the fact that during this time the Mormons found no time in their activities for the United Order. For almost thirty years they made no attempt whatsoever to reestablish a practice which they believed to be of divine origin and capable of bringing about economic perfection. Other communistic societies invariably utilized their particular systems at the very beginning and as the most important means of starting them on the way towards financial independence. In no case was it superimposed upon a group after such group had attained some measure of economic advancement. But with the Mormons the matter was otherwise. Their communistic scheme was in no way initially employed in Utah as the means to produce their livelihood and extend their domain. Why they so neglected the order is difficult to understand in view of the manner in which it was first promulgated. But it cannot be stated with accuracy that they had entirely lost faith in Joseph

3. For a discussion of these matters see "Coöperation Among the Mormons," by the present writer, in the May, 1917, number of the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.







Smith's plan; the only explanation vouchsafed by their leaders was that the people, as a whole, had not yet reached such a state of unselfishness that the order could be conducted successfully. That this handicap would eventually be overcome the Mormon chiefs undoubtedly believed. Finally, in 1873, Brigham Young decided that the time was opportune, and began preparations to essay another trial of the system.

Inasmuch as no estimate of Mormon communism in Utah can be formed without reference to this man, something should be said at this point about his personality and characteristics. Just as Joseph Smith dominated the spiritual and temporal activities of his followers in the early days of the church, so Brigham Young, in much greater measure, controlled the religious, social, economic, and political life of the Latter-day Saints. As supreme head of the church organization, which by this time had been worked out in meticulous detail and was functioning with astonishing efficiency; as the final arbiter of all questions of doctrine and practice; as the custodian of all church property; and as the first federally appointed governor of the Territory, his power was virtually without limit. Nor can it fairly be denied that he displayed a peculiar fitness and ability to fill the unusual position he held and to exercise the extraordinary functions which lay within his power. If he was by nature measurably autocratic, the very forcefulness and thoroughness of his leadership furnished exactly the qualities needed to bring his pioneer people, as a body and with the least possible friction, past the undeniably difficult problems which faced them. Even if he was the unquestioned master of their activities, he knew instinctively how to use his power for the accomplishment of common purposes. Regardless of what may be thought of his teachings, history can point to



few men who were his peers as successful colonizers. Essentially he showed himself a man of practical affairs. Unlike Joseph Smith, he never purported to receive a single revelation during all the time he presided over the Mormon church in Utah — his chief concern centered apparently in mundane rather than celestial matters. Hence when he decided that his people should again take up the United Order, it was a foregone conclusion that such would be done.

With the full influence of his power behind his every word, President Young, early in 1873, commenced to advocate the installation of a method of holding property in common. He excused the delay thus far suffered on the ground that he had not yet been able to work out a plan of legal organization "that lawyers cannot pick to pieces and destroy."<sup>4</sup> His aim was all-inclusive — nothing less than "to organize the Latter-day Saints, every man, woman and child among them, who has a desire to be organized, into this holy order."<sup>5</sup> A society was to be established in each Mormon settlement and all were to be component parts of a great system over which the general authorities of the church were to exercise control. While the proposed scheme was not formulated and published in complete detail at first, the objects the Mormon leader hoped to attain were clearly presented. In his own words they were:

Our object is to labor for the benefit of the whole; to retrench on our expenditures; to be prudent and economical; to study well the necessities of the community, and to pass by its many useless wants; to study to secure life, health, wealth and union, which is power and influence to any community.<sup>6</sup>

4. Journal of Discourses, vol. xvi, p. 122, June 29, 1873.

5. Ibid., vol. xvii, p. 43, April 18, 1874.

6. Ibid., vol. xvii, p. 57, May 7, 1874. That Brigham Young was extremely enthusiastic about his aspirations in this field appears from an address made in Salt Lake City, April 17, 1873, excerpts from which are as follows:

"... I know how to start such a society right in this city, and how to make its members rich. I would . . . buy out the poorest ward in this city, and then commence



Early in 1874 Brigham Young began to organize his followers. He undertook the initial move in St. George, Washington County, in the extreme southwestern part of the Territory, where the population was almost exclusively Mormon. Here he installed his machinery and placed it in running order. Then, as he moved northward towards Salt Lake City, he stopped in the principal Mormon settlements a sufficiently long time to establish a local group. As the news of the movement spread, many of the towns anticipated his forthcoming visit and adopted his suggestions of their own initiative. In addition he later sent out his immediate subordinates throughout the Territory to carry on the work of organization. Thus it resulted that by the time of the semi-annual conference, continued this year to May, the Mormon people had been brought into the plan with characteristic thoroughness, even including a number of wards in Salt Lake City. At this conference the speakers, by command of their chief, devoted their remarks chiefly to the new development. Finally, a central organization was effected for the entire project.<sup>7</sup>

It is not advisable to set forth in detail here the instructions which Brigham Young gave to his people while on his southern tour. In full realization of his power, he appreciated that his efforts must be concen-

with men and women who have not a dollar in the world. Bring them here from England, or any part of the earth, set them down in this ward and put them to work, and in five years we would begin to enter other wards, and we would buy this house and that house, and we would add ward to ward until we owned the whole city. . . . Would you like to know how to do this? I can tell you in a very few words — never want a thing you cannot get, live within your means, manufacture that which you wear and raise that which you eat. Raise every calf and lamb; raise the chickens and have your eggs, make your butter and cheese, and always have a little to spare. The first year we raise a crop, and we have more than we want. We buy nothing, we sell a little. The next year we raise more: we buy nothing and we sell more. In this way we could pile the gold and silver up and in twenty years a hundred families working like this could buy out their neighbors." *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvi, p. 11.

7. Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, vol. ii, pp. 839, 840.



trated along the line of explaining his scheme, rather than advocating its adoption — the latter might fairly be expected to follow as a matter of course. Characteristically he mixed a good deal of his religious philosophy with his economics; and he did not hesitate to expound the most unimportant detail of his plan or to discuss its effect on the most intimate of the social relationships. Parts of an address made in Nephi, Juab County, April 18, 1874, may be cited as typical:

And what are we to have when we enter this order? What we need to drink, eat and wear, and strict obedience to the requirements of those whom the Lord sets to guide and direct; that our sisters, instead of teasing their husbands for a dollar, five dollars, twenty-five dollars, for a fine dress, bonnet or artificials for themselves or their daughters, may go to work and learn how to make all these things for themselves, being organized into societies or classes for that purpose. And the brethren will be organized to do their farming, herding and raising cattle, sheep, fruit, grain and vegetables; and when they have raised these products every particle be gathered into a storehouse or storehouses, and every one have what is needed to sustain him. . . .

Organize the brethren and sisters and let each and every one have their duties to perform. Where they are destitute of houses, and it is convenient, the most economical plan that can be adopted is to have buildings erected large enough to accommodate a number of families. For instance, we will say there are a hundred families in this place who have not houses fit to live in. We will erect a building large enough to accommodate them all comfortably with every convenience for cooking, washing, ironing, etc.; and then, instead of each one of a hundred women getting up in the morning to cook breakfast for father and the large boys, that they may go to their labor, while the little children are crying and needing attention, breakfast for the whole can be prepared by five or ten women, with a man or two to help. Some may say — "This would be confusion." Not at all, it would do away with it. Another one says — "It will be a great trial to my feelings if I am obliged to go to breakfast with all these men and women. I am faint and sick and do not eat much, and I want my breakfast prepared in peace." Then build side rooms by the dozen or score, where you can eat by yourselves; and if you wish to invite three or four to eat with you, have your table, and everything you call for is sent to you. "Well, but I do not like this confusion of children." Let the children have their dining room to themselves, and let a certain number of the sisters be appointed to







take charge of the nursery and see that they have proper food, in proper quantities and at proper times, so as to preserve system and good order as far as possible. . . . Then let there be good teachers in the schoolroom and have beautiful gardens and take the little folks out and show them the beautiful flowers and teach them in their childhood the names and properties of every flower and plant. . . .<sup>8</sup>

It might fairly have been anticipated that Brigham Young, in his rejuvenation of communism, would base his efforts on the United Order plan which Joseph Smith claimed to have received by revelation. Such, however, was decidedly not the case.<sup>9</sup> Except for occasional references thereto by Orson Pratt, Smith's plan of "consecration" and "stewardship" did not figure in the Utah movement. The latter showed entirely different characteristics and attributes. First of all, the Mormon leader insisted that each local society be incorporated in legal form. To the common corporation, whose officers in general were the local ecclesiastical authorities, was transferred such property as formed the basis of the enterprise. Ordinarily this did not include the lands and houses of the members, nor the stores and business institutions already existing. Occasionally, however, property of these kinds was acquired by the corporation after it had existed for some time. What the members did contribute was cash, produce, implements, fixtures, and their labor. The intention apparently was to perform the community work on a common basis. Thus the labor on the farms, the grazing of the cattle and sheep, the operation of

8 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvii, pp. 44, 45.

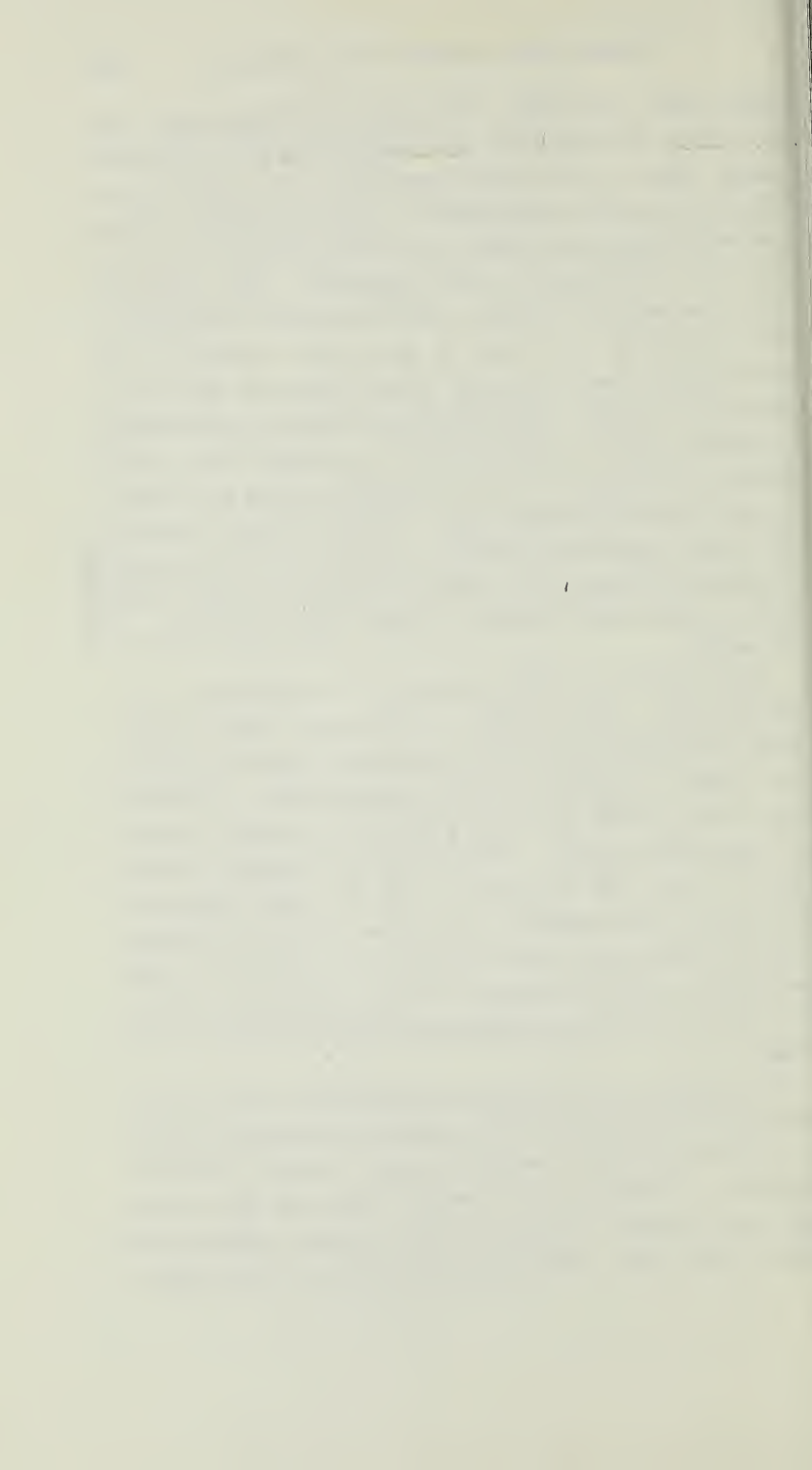
9. "Inquires one, 'What is it, what kind of an order is it? Tell us all about it.' I would tell you as much as I thought was wisdom if I understood it myself; but I do not; I have had but very little information about it. Suffice to say that I know that the order of things that could have been carried out successfully in Jackson County cannot be carried out here, on the same principle without a little variation. It cannot be done — circumstances require different laws, different counsel, an order of things suited to the condition of this desert county." Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvii, p. 35, April 6, 1874.



grist mills, saw mills, and similar establishments, the providing of wood from the nearby canyons — all such tasks were to be consummated for the people as a whole and not for individuals. All products from these undertakings were turned over to the general corporation for distribution to the members. Such division was presumably effected, not in accordance with services rendered, but upon a per capita basis on the assumption that the needs of all members were substantially similar. The direction of affairs, the division of labor, and the distribution of products lay in the hands of the local church authorities acting as the officers of the incorporated order. In effect, then, what the Mormons carried out was not a system of communistic property holding, but a plan of common, united effort with a supervised division of labor and distribution of proceeds.

The genesis of such a scheme is not difficult of ascertainment. Since 1847 the Mormons had successfully established and maintained their irrigation projects on a basis of general, united participation. Furthermore, since, 1868, they had profitably operated a chain of coöperative stores. What Brigham Young no doubt had in mind was to apply to all the other economic functions of his followers the same general principles. This is evident not only from his incorporation of each settlement and his leaving out the coöperative stores, but also in the other fundamental characteristics of his plan.

Here again, as in the earlier Missouri case, the data on the actual working out of the design is somewhat meagre — and for precisely the same reason, namely, its short duration. Definite it is, however, that the new order met with greater success in the younger settlements than in the older, well-established towns. But in gen-

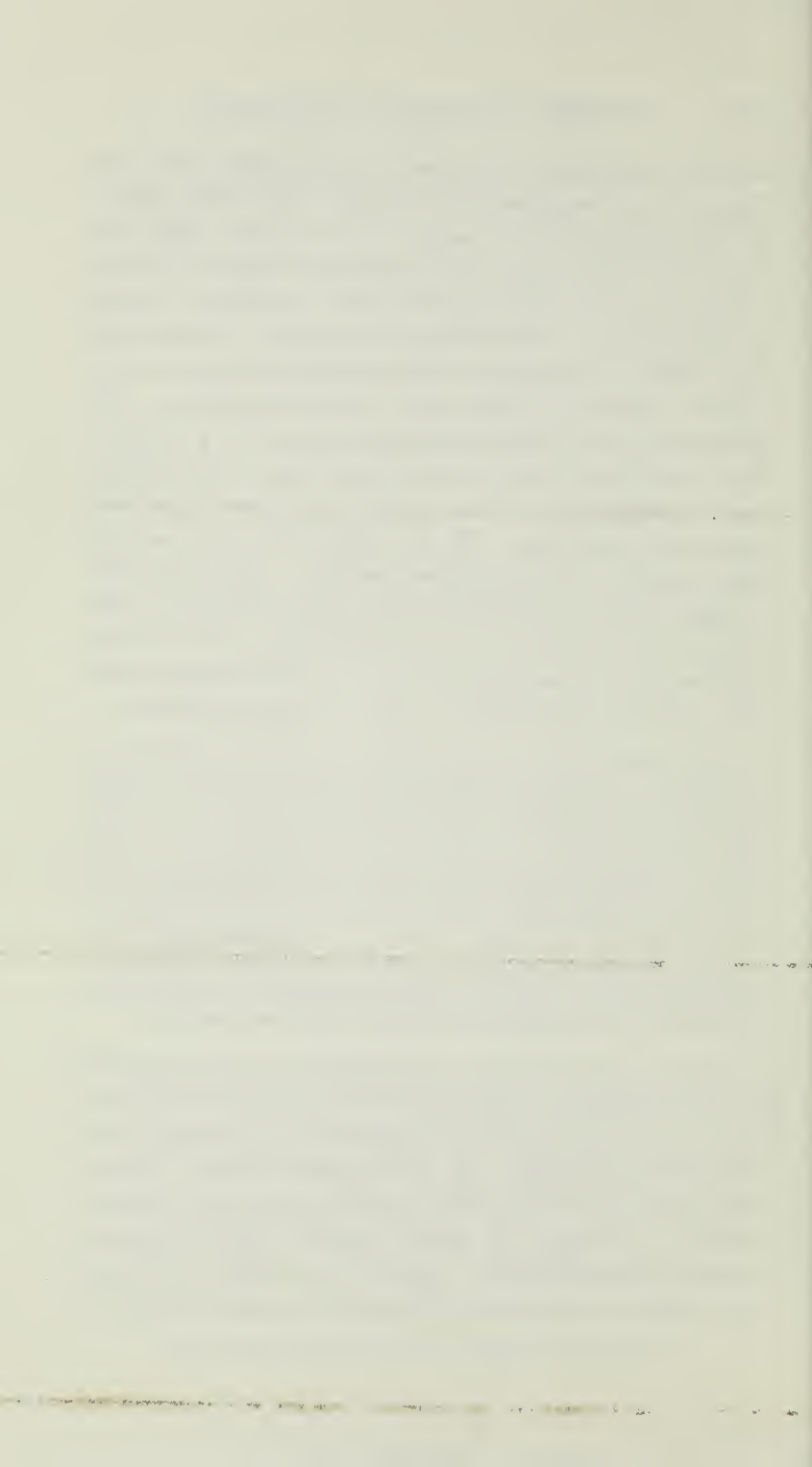


eral the experience of all was substantially the same. Hence what happened in one place will be illustrative of the experience of others. At the time under consideration, Price was a small Mormon village in Carbon County, in the eastern part of the Territory. George Q. Cannon, one of the Mormon apostles, visited Price soon after the order had been installed and in a subsequent address delineated his observations. The people had not turned in their property to a common fund, but they were pooling their labor. The bishop made assignments to the various tasks and supervised the work otherwise. All the inhabitants ate at one table and the women cooked together. They had previously tried to do their laundry work jointly, but that proved inexpedient and was abandoned. No attempt was essayed to erect and live in one or more large dwellings. Cannon describes the daily routine as follows:

After rising in the morning they meet in one room together and have prayers; then they sit down to breakfast, and while at breakfast the Superintendent converses with the men as to the arrangements of labor for the day. After breakfast they go to their work, one to one department, one to another. At noon they again assemble for dinner, eat their dinner after having asked a blessing upon it and then spend a little leisure until one o'clock or the hour expires — and then resume their labors. They come together again in the evening when they have supper and attend to prayers and spend the remainder of the evening in social conversation or in conversation on business or in arranging their affairs, as the case may be.<sup>1</sup>

But in spite of all the preparations and exhortations made by Brigham Young, his order was extremely short-lived. No sooner had it commenced to function than dissensions appeared. In some places certain individuals had not gone into the company and their apparent ability to prosper in equal measure with members aroused dissatisfaction. Again, men within the group soon began to pay more attention to that portion of

1. *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvii, pp. 237, 238, October 8, 1874.



their property which they had kept out than to the welfare of the organization — and this neglect rankled. Moreover, since distribution was made in substantial equality, the lazy and indifferent member received as much as the energetic worker; this was not calculated to insure harmony. Finally, the jealousies and envy inherent in human nature flashed out to work their crippling effect on the efficiency of the society.<sup>2</sup> The net result was that the corporations soon began to crumble and dissolve, and the members reverted to their former manner of individualistic economic life. Some of the combinations lasted only one or two months; others endured six or eight; but by the close of 1874 practically all had ceased to function. What property had been contributed to the order was in general returned to the donors, altho in some places — for example Lehi — bitter discontentment resulted from this final division. In less than a year after its installation, all that remained of the United Order in Utah was a memory. None of President Young's successors has displayed any inclination to revive the practice.<sup>3</sup>

One notable exception must be pointed out in this story of failure — the case of Orderville.<sup>4</sup> This little

2. "There have been in some instances indolence, carelessness, and indisposition to work and an inclination manifested to throw the labor upon those who are industrious and energetic. . . . There never was a day since our organization as a people, . . . when there were so many falsehoods in circulation about any principle as there have been about this United Order." George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. xvii, pp. 239, 241.

3. An interesting recurrence of the United Order idea has recently come to light in connection with the Re-organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with headquarters at Independence, Missouri. This sect was originally composed of Mormons who receded from the church at the time Brigham Young led the main body to Utah and who chose as their leader Joseph Smith, the son of the original founder. The present head of their organization is Frederick M. Smith, a grandson. In an address on April 6, 1920, entitled "The Church in Relation to World Problems," the last-named gentleman advocated a revival of his grandfather's order as a solution for present economic ills. The writer is not informed whether the proposal resulted in any concrete action.

4. Most of the information concerning Orderville was obtained from a manuscript history of the Orderville Ward, the local ecclesiastical unit. The manuscript was prepared in the office of the Church Historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day







village is located in Long Valley, Kane County, at the extreme southern end of Utah. In March of 1874 the town of Mt. Carmel, in this valley, was organized into the order. It lasted only a few weeks, when about half of the members decided to withdraw. The remainder, desiring to continue in their course, determined to move away by themselves. Accordingly they founded a settlement in the early spring of the same year about two miles above Mt. Carmel and named it Orderville after the system in which they lived. In this instance the land which they took up was turned directly into the order, as was all their other property. They erected their lumber shacks adjoining each other around a thirty-rod square in the center of which stood the general dining hall, a frame structure measuring twenty-five by forty feet. East of the dwellings lay a plat of fifteen acres — later twenty — for an orchard and vegetable garden. In other directions stretched the common fields for grain and other crops, constituting eventually 300 acres. The colony began with twenty-five families under Bishop Howard O. Spencer, but by July, 1875, it had increased to 150 people and by 1878 to a population of 560. In 1875 a saw mill was set up and operated by the group and in later years a flour mill, tannery, shoe shop, blacksmith shop, wagon shop, cooper shop, and cabinet shop were added. Finally in 1882 the society built a woolen mill, containing 200 spindles, at a cost of \$10,000. In the meantime a herd of cattle and a band of sheep had been acquired.

In general the Orderville concern displayed the same attributes as neighboring orders. It was incorporated July 14, 1875, as the "Orderville United Order." The officers consisted of a president, two vice-presidents, a

Saints, under the direction of Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jensen. To Mr. Jensen and his assistant, Mr. A. William Lund, the writer is greatly indebted for numerous courtesies extended in the preparation of this article.



secretary and treasurer, and nine directors. The last-mentioned board exercised general supervision over the affairs of the order, including the division of labor and the partition of proceeds; but any matter of importance was presented to a meeting of the entire body and the action taken was based upon common consent. Article 12 provides that a member may withdraw what he had previously donated to the company after payment of any indebtedness and after deducting as tithing 10 per cent of the yearly increase in his holdings and 10 per cent of his annual labor for the corporation. Under the terms of Article 13, new members might be added by a two-thirds vote of the existing owners. The articles also included a number of rules of conduct intended to regulate the religious belief and activities of adherents, including a requirement that each member contribute "for church purposes" one-tenth of the annual increase of his holdings and one-tenth of his labor.<sup>5</sup> Further-

5. "17. We will treat our families with due kindness and affection and set before them an example worthy of imitation; in our families and in our intercourse with all persons we will refrain from being contentious or quarrelsome, and we will cease to speak evil of each other and will cultivate a spirit of charity towards all. We consider it our duty to keep from acting selfishly or from covetous motives and will seek the interests of each other and the salvation of all mankind.

20. That which is not committed to our care we will not appropriate to our own use.

21. That which we borrow we will return according to promise, and that which we find we will not appropriate to our own use, but seek to return to its proper owner.

22. We will, as soon as possible, cancel all individual indebtedness contracted prior to our uniting with the Order, and when once fully identified with said Order, will contract no debts contrary to the wishes of the Board of Directors.

23. We will patronize our brethern who are in the Order.

24. In our apparel and deportment we will not pattern after nor encourage foolish and extravagant fashions and cease to import or buy from abroad any article which can be reasonably dispensed with, or which can be produced by combination of home labor. We will foster and encourage the producing and manufacturing of all articles needful for our consumption as fast as our circumstances will permit.

25. We will be simple in our dress and manner of living, using proper economy and prudence in the management of all things entrusted to our care.

26. We will combine our labor for mutual benefit, sustain with our faith, prayers and works those whom we have elected to take the management of the different departments of the Order and be subject to them in their official capacity, refraining from a spirit of fault finding.

27. We will honestly and diligently labor and devote ourselves and all we have to the Order and the building up of the kingdom of God."



more, each applicant was compelled to answer satisfactorily twenty prescribed questions<sup>6</sup> touching his personal conduct and religious professions. A peculiarity of the order with respect to compensation was brought to light in a letter, dated January 17, 1877, from President Young to Bishop Spencer:

6. "1. What is your object in seeking to unite yourself with this company? Do you believe the Lord requires you to take this course?

2. Have you a family? If so, what is the number? Are they with you, without exception, in the course you wish to take? What is your present situation with regard to food and clothing? Do you train your family in the fear of the Lord? Do they seem to practice your teachings and walk according to your example?

3. Are you in debt, or is there any person or persons that claim to have any pretext for claim against you or yours? If so, what is the nature of the pretext or the amount of your indebtedness?

4. Is there any incumbrance on any species of property which you have in your possession?

5. Are you willing for yourself and all you possess to be governed and controlled by the Board of management or any person or persons authorized by them to act?

6. Do you think that you could come and make your permanent home with this company of people and if necessary put up with all the inconveniences that older members had and have without murmuring or fault finding or becoming dissatisfied and wishing to withdraw from the company and thereby putting the company to unnecessary trouble and inconvenience?

7. Are you willing to practice economy in all its points and bearings and try to content yourself although you may think that your trials are hard at times?

8. Do you use tobacco, tea, coffee or indulge in drinking intoxicating drinks?

9. Are you in the habit of stealing or taking that which does not belong to you personally?

10. Are you in the habit of lying or backbiting or slandering your brethren or sisters?

11. Are you in the habit of swearing or using profane oaths or taking the name of the Lord in vain?

12. Are you in the habit of using vulgar or obscene language or indulging in obscene jests or conduct?

13. Are you in the habit of quarreling? If so, will you cease from this?

14. Are you in the habit of giving way to bad temper and abusing dumb animals? If so, will you cease from such conduct?

15. Will you take a course, when you find a brother or sister out of temper, to maintain peace, by saying nothing to aggravate and silently walk away if he or she will not cease?

16. Are you willing to be subject to those who are placed over you and do as you are told cheerfully and not sullenly?

17. Are you willing to work the same as the rest of the company according to your strength and ability and for the same recompense as your peers?

18. Are you willing to conform to the general rule of eating your food in company with the rest of your brethren and sisters?

19. Will you be diligent in trying to conform to the rules of good order in all things and not appropriate to your own use or the use of the Company any tool or implement of husbandry or any kind of produce without first obtaining the permission to do so from the persons having charge of such tools, implements, produce or other property?

20. Will you try to the best of your ability to maintain the peace and prosperity of this Order and as much as lies in your power deal honestly, impartially and justly in all transactions you may be called upon to perform from time to time?"



... It would be well to have a rate of compensation for day or job work and give to each one credit for what they do. This rate may be quite low, but when once fixed, all should sign an agreement to abide by it and to accept the rate as compensation in full for all labor performed by them in your organization. This rate may be fixed by common consent, or a committee may be appointed for the purpose of assessing the rate to be allowed for labor.

... This will work no hardship whatever to the true and faithful, but will aid as a check to the greed of those who may apostatize from your organization and who may desire to bring trouble upon you.

In fact, however, the actual practice was to strike a balance between the society and the individual at the end of the year; if the member was in arrears to the order, his indebtedness was wiped out, whereas if the order owed the member, he donated the amount of his credit. By this method they sought to preserve equality.

The "Orderville United Order" operated successfully for almost ten years. In 1883, however, certain participants began to express disapprobation of existing conditions. This was materially accentuated by the remarks of Apostle Erastus Snow at a local conference in July of that year, who stated that the concern was little better than the ordinary Mormon coöperative store, that the credit system was defective, and that they had best revert to simple coöperation. Such a blow from so high a source struck at the very foundation of the order, so Bishop Thomas Chamberlain made a special trip to Salt Lake City to consult the church authorities. John Taylor had by this time succeeded Brigham Young as president of the church and neither he nor his associates could offer much encouragement. The net result was that the order was discontinued. By 1885 all the property had been distributed to the stockholders — this time with universal satisfaction — and the Orderville communistic society was no more.





Just as was the case in Missouri, the practice of the United Order in Utah did not result directly from the physical environment or the social make-up of the Mormon people. Admittedly both of these factors may have been influential in determining to some extent the direction and attributes of the Utah variety; but the fact that twenty-seven years elapsed before it was instituted shows that neither of these forces, nor both combined, were the proximate causes of its coming into being. Rather did it eventuate because of the instructions of Brigham Young that such should be the case. Nor can it be denied that in the entire economic life of the Mormon people in Utah, considered as a whole, the United Order played a relatively unimportant rôle.

## V

So reads the story of Mormon communism. It is a record in which they may not justly display any great measure of pride. Twice they attempted the practice of their order and twice they failed. Viewed in the light of their other economic achievements, the lack of success in this field is little less than astonishing. As colonizers the Mormons have never been surpassed in western America; by means of concerted effort in irrigation they subjugated a desert waste and made it a highly productive principality. Nor were their attainments with coöperation less noteworthy, especially at first. Yet when they sought to institute the United Order, they seemed unable to prosper; in fact this was the one conspicuous failure of Brigham Young in economic matters. Where the Shakers endured for 121 years,<sup>7</sup> the Ephrata Community for 175 years,<sup>8</sup>

7. Hinds, p. 32.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.



the Harmonists for 102 years,<sup>9</sup> the Separatists for 82 years,<sup>1</sup> and the Amana Inspirationists for at least 65 years,<sup>2</sup> the life of the United Order, except for the single instance of Orderville, must be measured in months. To what reasons may this chronicle of disaster be accredited? What qualities essential to the successful conduct of community affairs were lacking in the order or the people who espoused it?

It can hardly be contended that the binding ties of religion were missing. Hinds maintains "that while no special religious system or special interpretation of the Scriptures is essential to success in Communism, agreement is indispensable, and thus far has most surely come through the religious life."<sup>3</sup> Mormon history demonstrates conclusively that few creeds have bound their adherents so closely and firmly to themselves as has Mormonism.

Nor was the Mormon leadership, through any lack of capacity, the chief cause of failure. Nordhoff emphasizes the importance of proper commune leaders. "The 'leading character,' " he says, "is sure to be a man of force and ability, and he forms the habits, not only of daily life, but even of thought, of those whom he governs."<sup>4</sup> Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were men of this type—strong personalities with tremendous influence over their followers. True it is that neither lived with or participated in a particular United Order society. Yet the actual head of the local organization, the bishop, in practically all cases stood in the same relation to his community as did the two presidents to the Mormons as a whole.

9. Hinds, p. 73.

1. Ibid., pp. 101, 119.

2. Ibid., p. 307. These figures are taken as of 1908, the date of issue of Hinds' revised edition of *American Communities*. See *ibid.*, p. 596.

3. Ibid., p. 592. See also, Nordhoff, p. 387.

4. Ibid., p. 396.



Again, the downfall of the Mormon order cannot be blamed to their theory of family life. According to Hinds, "successful Communism is not dependent on any single theory of the sexual relation, monogamic communities having been as prosperous as the celibate ones, and those favoring complex marriage as prosperous as those holding to monogamy."<sup>5</sup> The limited practice of plural marriage among the Mormons surely did not affect their communism adversely to a greater extent than the strict celibacy of the Shakers,<sup>6</sup> the modified celibacy of the Rappists,<sup>7</sup> or the "complex marriage" of the Oneida Perfectionists.<sup>8</sup>

Certain of the Mormon leaders and writers have maintained that the United Order came to grief solely because the people who entered it were not sufficiently unselfish, charitable, and broad-minded to live up to its requirements. No doubt here, as in other communes, the frailties of human nature functioned potently against the successful and efficient operation of the project. Yet other communities endured for decades with a class of members in no wise superior to the Mormons in energy, earnestness, strength of character, sincerity, and moral fibre.

Similarly, blame may not be laid measurably to the form of the United Order itself, whether of the Missouri or the Utah variety. The history of communistic groups in America will bear out the statement that successful societies possessed community machinery as varied in characteristics and attributes as those of the people themselves. Mere form unquestionably has not proved to be the determining factor.

5. Hinds, p. 592.

6. Nordhoff, p. 166.

7. Hinds, p. 91.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 190-192, 210; Nordhoff, pp. 271, 276, 277.





What, then, was the effective cause of the failure of the order? All or most of the elements just pointed out may have had something to do with the final outcome. But probably the chief reason is found in the fact that the United Order was thrust upon the Mormons, both in Missouri and Utah, without adequate preparation having been made for its reception. The longest enduring of the American communities have started at the very beginning of their group existence with the adoption of such steps as would eventually lead to their desired goal; and by means of a gradual growth and development have finally attained the stage of communism. In Missouri such was not the case, for an abrupt entry was made into the order without previous education to its functions and without any intermediate transitional period. In Utah the method employed was even more aggravated. Instead of extending, slowly and carefully and by degrees, the custom of common effort theretofore used in irrigation and coöperation into other departments of economic life, instead of insisting upon some kind of probationary period such as practically all other communistic groups have found an absolute requisite to their own safety and protection, it was sought at one stroke, extending all over Utah, completely to revolutionize the accustomed manner of dealing with practical affairs. When people have become habituated to one kind of life for almost thirty years, it need hardly be expected that they can effect a fundamental change over night. And such proved to be the actual result.

But orthodox Mormons have not given up their hope in the United Order. No intimation, it is true, has been vouchsafed by the church leaders that the practice might be revived. Yet at those increasingly infrequent occasions when the matter comes to mind at all, it is



with an idea that at some time in the nebulous future the Mormon people will for the third time take up the order. ". . . the Saints confidently await the day," says Apostle Talmage, "in which they will devote, not merely a tithe of their substance, but all that they have, and all that they are, to the service of their God; a day in which no man will speak of mine and thine, but all things shall be theirs and the Lord's." <sup>9</sup>

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SALT LAKE CITY,  
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9. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, pp. 451, 452.



